

Indian Ford Bridge
SW of London Mills
Fulton County
Illinois

HAER No. IL-13

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: Spanning the Spoon River, on Federal Aide Secondary Route 450 (County Highway 20), Northwest 1/4, Section 9, Township 8 North, Range 2 East, 4th P.M., 1-1/2 miles southwest of London Mills, Fulton County, Illinois

Date of Construction: 1917

Present Owner: County of Fulton, Illinois
Court House
Lewiston, Illinois 61542

Present Use: One lane bridge for vehicles, open to maximum load at eight tons, and so posted.

Significance: The Indian Ford Bridge is one of nine remaining steel through truss bridges constructed approximately between 1880 and 1917 in Fulton County on County and Township roads over the Spoon River. The bridge exhibits components of the early development of riveted Pratt Truss bridges constructed in Illinois.

Historian and Date: Marcus J. Rice, July 1984

Transmitted by: Jean P. Yearby, HAER, 1985

The Indian Ford Bridge is one of nine remaining steel through truss bridges constructed approximately between 1880 and 1917 in Fulton County on County and Township roads over the Spoon River. The bridge exhibits components of the early development of riveted Pratt Truss bridges constructed in Illinois.

The contract for the Indian Ford Bridge was let by the State Highway Commission to the Illinois Steel Bridge Company of Jacksonville, Illinois, in late March or early April 1917. The bid was \$14,675.00 or \$5.00 less than the estimated cost. The County of Fulton was required to pay \$9,000.00 of the contract price and the State of Illinois the remainder. The present bridge is a replacement of an earlier iron bridge.

The Indian Ford Bridge, as it stands today, is a single span Pratt Truss with one reinforced concrete half-through girder approach span with a concrete floor. Both abutments are closed concrete with one solid concrete pier. The truss span is composed of seven panels, twenty feet long, for a total length of 140 feet center to center of bearings and crosses the Spoon River channel. The concrete girder is an approach span at the east end of the truss and is forty feet long. The clear roadway width on the bridge is 17 feet. The truss joints are riveted. All truss members are made up of angles, channels and plates riveted together in various combinations. The portals and cross bracing are angles. The floor of the bridge is concrete for the full length. Unfortunately, there are no plans available for this bridge.

The importance of this Pratt truss bridge is that it can be considered an early example of riveted type construction. This bridge is one of the focuses of tourism within the county and is featured in a motor tour of the county and a canoe trip along the Spoon River, a navigable waterway.

Excellent farming land was the major impetus for the settlement and subsequent development of Fulton County. As such, the Spoon River was important as a means of transporting goods to markets along the Illinois River. Due to this, settlements grew along the river to capitalize on this river traffic. Specifically, mills grew along ford and ferry sites which spurred further development at these sites. Eventually, bridges replaced these fords and ferries as the demand for better transportation routes increased. Fords, it seems, were replaced earlier than ferries, as the bridge at Indian Ford is a replacement of an earlier iron bridge.

It is important to note that the only historical significance of this bridge is its connection with new design methods and the use of steel in bridge construction.

As is the case with most steel structures over 50 years old, the Indian Ford Bridge has reached and exceeded its life expectancy. A new bridge is now necessary to carry wider and heavier traffic, and to meet the needs of approximately 1,600 people residing in the surrounding communities. Plans have been prepared to replace the Indian Ford Bridge with a three-span continuous welded plate girder bridge, 400 feet long with a roadway width of 28 feet.

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The county highway crossing the Indian Ford Bridge serves as a school bus route, mail route, access for emergency vehicles, and as a farm-to-market road for residents located on either side of the Spoon River. Within the past few years, new bridges have been constructed on this highway which extends between Avon at the west and London Mills at the east end. After completion of this improvement, all restrictions to loads on bridges located on this highway will be removed.